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AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR OVERSEAS AID
(INCORPORATED IN THE ACT)

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12/9/89

Re Papal visit to East Timor

I have been informed today by Catholic Church sources in Indonesia that the following arrangements are in place for the Papal visit to Indonesia and East Timor:

1. The visit will take place 9 - 14 October.

2. The Pope will fly by South Korean airlines from Seoul direct to Jakarta. (Hong Kong, it seems, was never on the agenda).

3. He will land at the Halim military airport in Jakarta, not the Sukarno-Hatta international airport. This is standard procedure for Heads of State and is dictated by security considerations.

4. He will visit Indonesia as a guest of the Indonesian Government (not the Bishops' Conference as, for example, when he visited Brazil).

5. The itinerary is as follows:

9 October - Jakarta
10 October - Yogyakarta
11 October - Maumere (Flores)
12 October - Dili
13 October - Jakarta (government function and opening of Indonesian Bishops' Conference)
- visits Medan (Sumatra)
14 October - leaves for Mauritius

6. The language of the liturgy for the whole visit, including East Timor, will be Bahasa Indonesia.

7. The Pope will travel in Indonesia in an Indonesian government plane.

8. The Indonesian Church does not have control over the visit. Ultimately this rests with the Indonesian Government ('everything is being done by the government'), which is contributing to the cost of the visit, and the Vatican. The Indonesian Church is lobbying the Vatican to ensure that during the visit the Pope (1) emphasises the role of the laity, (2) encourages the poor and those, particularly in remote areas, working with them.

9. The Indonesian Church is urging the Pope to kiss the ground only in Jakarta and not in East Timor.

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A friend who visited Dili two weeks ago advises as follows:

1. Bishop Belo is disappointed at the lack of support from the international community, and the Church in particular, for his 'referendum' proposal.

2. The Church and people feel ambivalent about the Pope's visit. On the one hand, they want him to visit because he's the Pope, on the other, they are fearful of the political implications. However, they feel they have made their position clear, cannot stop the visit, and can only hope now that the Pope will not let them down. They are not preparing for the visit with great enthusiasm, and the organising committee has not met yet.

3. Many Indonesian Catholics are expected to visit Dili on 12 October from the neighbouring regions, e.g. Kupang and West Timor, Alor etc. (The Vatican may well use their presence to justify the use of Bahasa Indonesia).

4. Bishop Belo says he has been assured that the Pope's visit will not change the Vatican's position.

5. Many in Dili are fearful that there will be a crackdown following the Papal visit and possible restrictions on foreign visits.

6. My friend was struck by the atmosphere of fear and extreme caution evident even in Dili.

7. The view in Dili is that Fretilin have the capacity to make their presence felt anywhere in East Timor at any time.

Best regards

Pat Walsh.

The following resolution on East Timor was adopted unanimously at the ACFOA Annual Council meeting in Canberra on 10 September 1989:

Council notes both the recent decision of the UN sub-Commission on Human Rights to restore East Timor to its agenda and appeals by the head of the Catholic Church in East Timor, Bishop Belo, for a referendum on the country's future.

Council believes that the reality of on-going conflict and human rights violations in East Timor must be recognised and that the right of the people to have a say on their future is fundamental to a lasting settlement.

Council therefore deeply regrets the political campaign to discredit Bishop Belo and his initiative. Council calls on the Australian Government and community to respond positively to Bishop Belo's appeal on behalf of the East Timorese people and to fully support moves within the UN system and elsewhere to find a just solution to the issue. (Emphasis added)